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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the position of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities regarding the provision of educational services to students with learning disabilities (LD). The importance of providing a continuum of public and private services is stressed. Seven recommendations were made by the committee: (1) involved professionals should understand the nature and effects of learning disabilities; (2) the types of disabilities and the degrees of severity should determine the characteristics of the service options (which range from regular education programs to placement in a specialized education program at a residential facility); (3) the long term nature of LD requires a continuity of programs and services; (4) the primary instructional focus should be on the academic, cognitive, and linguistic deficits (with additional attention to other social, learning, and behavioral problems that may exacerbate existing disabilities); (5) professionals must offer a variety of instructional programs; (6) parents should be given opportunities for meaningful involvement; and (7) administrators should actively advocate for effective instruction. (CL)

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ISSUES IN THE DELIVERY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

A Position Paper of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities
February 21, 1982

Providing appropriate education for individuals must be the principal concept on which all educational programs and services are developed. The right of an individual to an appropriate education must be ensured. For children, youth, and adults with learning disabilities to receive appropriate education, alternative and modified instruction as well as a diverse range of services provided by professionals with differing preparation, skills, and expertise are necessary. It is the position of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) that special education programs and support services for individuals with learning disabilities must be part of an education agency's total instructional program and must not be regarded as a separate and parallel system. Provision of appropriate education requires that a continuum of public and private educational programs and services and a variety of instructional strategies be available for all individuals from early childhood throughout life.

There are challenges that must be addressed in developing a continuum of educational programs and services. One challenge is related to financial contraints that may influence establishment of program priorities. Nevertheless, it remains the responsibility of education agencies to provide a continuum of appropriate educational programs and services for individuals with learning disabilities. This can be achieved by the application of creative management strategies as well as judicious and innovative use of resources.

The NJCLD has developed this position paper based on the principle that the goal of education is to prepare each individual to function effectively and productively as a self-sufficient and contributing member of society. After a careful consideration of issues pertinent to service delivery and after reviewing model service delivery programs, the NJCLD makes the following recommendations with regard to services for individuals with learning disabilities:

1. The planning, design and implementation of appropriate service options and instructional strategies are predicated upon all concerned professionals having a clear understanding of what learning disabilities are[1] and the manner in which these different disabilities modify how an individual learns. The selection of instructional strategies or the type of educational placement must be determined by a comprehensive and integrated assessment derived from multidisciplinary evaluation(s) of the individual at risk for learning disabilities. Multidisciplinary decision-making rather than token participation by various personnel is essential for the delivery of effective services.

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[1]For details and information see Learning Disabilities: Issues on Definition, a position paper prepared by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. Unpublished manuscript, January 30, 1981.

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Decisions pertaining to placement and programming within the public and private sector are influenced by the following: the individual's learning characteristics; the educational philosophy of the agency; the competence, experience, and attitudes of professional personnel within the the public and private sector; geographic constraints; and the instructional strategies and resources inherent within each educational placement. Once selected, the educational placement and instructional strategies must be reviewed periodically and systematically. This review should effect appropriate program modifications based on a recognition of changes in the individual's needs. Throughout their lives, individuals with learning disabilities may be at risk for unnecessary failure. Consequently, a review system must be provided throughout an individual's school career to ensure that appropriate educational services are provided when needed.

2. <u>The types of disabilities and the degrees of severity determine the characteristics of the service options.</u> The NJCLD recommends the development of the following types of service options for individuals with learning disabilities. Within the continuum of service options presented below, it is implicit that comprehensive assessments, monitoring of the individual's progress, systematic observation, review of curriculum, instructional approaches, and placement as well as careful follow-up will be included. Appropriate consultative services by professionals from different disciplines should be availabel and used effectively. Flexibility of scheduling, improved interprofessional communication, and coordination of services are essential.

SERVICE OPTIONS

I This option is a regular education program placement in which the teacher receives consultative assistance from appropriate professionals. It is essential that the teacher be provided with assessment procedures as well as instructional approaches through demonstration teaching.

II This option is for individuals who are able to function primarily in a regular education program with specialist consultation provided to the teacher, but who also require direct service assistance from specialized personnel. These services can be provided either in the regular educational program (e.g., individual tutoring, small group instruction) or in a separate setting (e.g., resource room, clinical setting). In Option II placement, the number of service providers dealing with the individual may increase.

III This option is for individuals who require primary placement in a specialized education program while participating in selected aspects of the regular education program. The extent of integration will be a function of the individual's abilities in relation to program options. The direct provision of services by specialized personnel to the individual or teacher must be available and used as needed.

IV This option is for individuals who require placement in a specialized education program at a non-residential facility, e.g., self-contained classroom or special school. The direct provision of services by specialized personnel to the individual or teacher must be available and used as needed.

V This option is for individuals who require placement in a specialized education program at a residential facility. Generally, this placement is for individuals whose learning disabilities are accompanied by other disorders or for those for whom an appropriate specialized educational program is not available at a non-residential facility.

Although other options exist for the education of individuals with learning disabilities, it is not within the scope of this paper to provide a complete review of these models. However, it is important to state that some placements, e.g., multi-cross categorical programs, are not always appropriate for individuals with learning disabilities unless these programs provide for instruction by personnel with knowledge of learning disabilities, provide for comprehensive assessment and planning, and maintain the use of alternative or modified methods of instruction that will meet the unique learning needs of individuals with learning disabilities. Regardless of the service option, provision must be made for careful integration of all information related to the diagnosis and education of the individual with learning disabilities.

3. <u>The long-term nature of learning disabilities necessitates a continuity of programs and services.</u> The full range of programs and services should be designed and implemented for individuals with learning disabilities at all age levels, preschool through post-secondary. Aspects of the service delivery change over time. For instance, the needs of children from age 3 to 9 years of age are markedly variable. The use of diagnostic teaching with this age group is necessary and may need to be continued from the preschool years through the primary grades. When properly applied, the information gained from diagnostic teaching can avoid the danger of assigning a child to a particular type of service that might otherwise be inappropriate.

At the other end of the continuum, individuals with learning disabilities at the secondary level should have access to a variety of supplemental services. Such alternatives might include the following: basic skills education; career/vocational planning, counseling, and education; the use of vocational rehabilitation services and tutoring in the academic content areas; compensatory approaches to learning; teaching learning and life-skills strategies; and counseling and preparation for college attendance.

4. For individuals with learning disabilities, the primary instructional or remedial focus should be on activities directly related to the enhancement of functioning in the areas of manifested disabilities, i. e., listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, and mathematics. While the primary educational intervention should focus on the academic, linguistic, and cognitive natures of the disabilities, effective intervention also must, when necessary, address such correlates as hyperactivity, disorders of attention, learning styles, and issues of self-image and control, as well as problems in social relationships. These may all exacerbate the existing disabilities.

5. Professional personnel who provide services to indivduals with learning disabilities must possess the flexibility to offer a variety of instructional approaches. Rigid adherence to partisan pedagogical perspectives about assessment and intervention is indefensible because of the diversity of existing individual needs and the wide variety of strategies, technology, and resources available to meet the needs of individuals with learning disabilities.

6. Parents of and individuals with learning disabilities should be given maximal opportunities for meaningful involvement in the educational programs. Regardless of the competence of professional personnel in provding services, programs for individuals with learning disabilities will be limited to the extent that the special commitment and abilities of both parents and affected individuals are not used. Therefore, opportunity must be provided to parents of and individuals with learning disabilities to participate actively in the educational process.

7. Educational administrators, including program directors, principals, and curriculum specialists, should assume an active and formal role in advocating for the interests of individuals within the educational setting. Administrators as well as all professional personnel and faculties must become more knowledgeable of the theoretical and practical issues involved in providing optimal services for individuals with learning disabilities. This can be achieved through the provision of in-service programs which are the principal means through which the educational agencies change the interaction between teachers and students. In addition, educational administrators must accept the primacy of their role in holding the individual as the focus of all planning. For example, time should be provided for teachers and specialized personnel to plan and discuss the needs of the individual with learning disabilities so that effective education may occur. The focus in the education of individuals with learning disabilities must be instruction. This can be achieved only through the cooperation of

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[2]For details and more information see Inservice Programs in Learning Disabilities. A position paper of the Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. Unpublished manuscript, September 27, 1981.

parents, students, educational administrators, teachers, and specialized personnel in the planning and implementation of appropriate curriculum, instructional approaches, and service options.

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities is a committee of co-operating organizations concerned with individuals with learning disabilities. Organizations represented and representatives for 1982 inlude:

Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

Council for Learning Disabilities

Division for Children with Communication Disorders, Council for Exceptional Children

International Reading Association

The Orton Dyslexia Society

This is a final draft copy of a position paper of the NJCLD. This copy has been forwarded for final approval and adoption to the governing body of the member associations, and final adoption is pending.

Permission is hereby granted to reproduce this final paper in its entirety, including the above explanation.

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